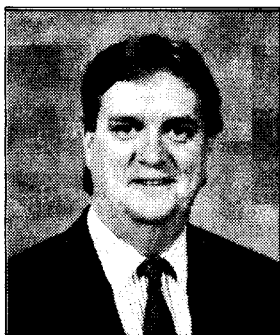
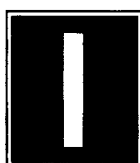


The Internet changes once again

By Jim Carroll



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t is always fascinating to be on the verge of a new information revolution.

When I first used a modem back in 1982—it had a 300 bits per second baud rate!—I kind of said to myself, “Wow,” as I began to explore the early regions of the online frontier. When I first saw the World Wide Web in 1993, I was blown away at the concept of the graphical online universe. And when I first used Netscape Navigator, I was in awe of what the Internet was set to become, since it helped to make the concept of surfing so darned easy to do.

I have just had a similar experience—this time, because of a digital camera. I have been fortunate enough to obtain Sony's first digital camera—officially, it is a DSC-F1. It is a compact little device but is actually a lot smaller than your typical camera even though it looks like one. And if you look at it, you realize that in addition to being a camera, it is actually a computer as well. After all, it has four megabytes of memory used to store the pictures—there is no film. It has a color liquid-crystal display (LCD) screen rather than an eyepiece which you use to line up the picture that you want to take. Snap the picture, and you instantly see the results on the LCD screen.

The whole concept of a digital camera is that you can view the pictures in a variety of ways, primarily on your computer or television. There is a cable and a software program that you can use to transfer the photos over to your computer, where it is stored simply as a computer file. If you want, you can print your pictures—Sony now sells a new printer that gives you photo-quality pictures on paper.

What is the connection with the Internet? Simple. Photographs are proving to be a useful—and sometimes dubious—addition to any

Web site. Sony, like many electronics manufacturers, has realized that the exploding use of the Internet has led to a new opportunity to establish a market for the digital camera. And what I am finding is that the combination of a digital camera and the Internet is an almost magical one.

Consider what I have been doing. Because there is no film involved—and hence, no cost for every single picture that I snap—I find myself being a lot more liberal with the pictures I take. I am driving my family crazy, taking the camera everywhere I go. If I do not like a photo I just took—remember, I can see it instantly—I simply press the delete key to wipe it out. No fuss, no muss. Since I can store 59 pictures in the camera before transferring them to my PC, I've got a lot of room for experimentation.

What I have come to realize is that if you combine the distribution capabilities of the

Internet with the output of a digital camera, the possibilities start to get really interesting. Like most people, I've got a lot of family on line all over the country—my dad in Nova Scotia, several sisters, a brother, and all kinds of cousins, aunts and uncles. Normally, we send them a few photos every couple of months, and see them on an irregular basis throughout the year.



Sony DSC-F1 digital camera

But the digital camera is changing that. I started out by zipping a bunch of family pictures that I have taken, and sent them to my dad by electronic mail so he could show mom on his computer. Kind of a fun way to get some recent shots to them. Then I started working on setting up a private area on my Web site for family and friends, creating a sort of online snapshot gallery. I can add pictures rather instantly to this, so if there has been something interesting going on, I can let them know via e-mail.

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It is almost like I have discovered a whole new use for the Internet—snapshot distribution!

I have also come to realize that beyond friends and family, people who surf the Web really do have an interest in knowing a little bit more about the people they visit on line. One of the first things I did was take a self-portrait of myself in my home office, placing it on my Web site. I soon found that the vast majority of visitors to my site took the 30 seconds or so that it took to wait for the picture to appear. Why? Who knows? Curiosity, I suppose.

And so I began to create a digital gallery on my Web site of some of my travels—of the groups I am speaking to, or of some behind-the-scenes stuff of the TV and radio appearances that I make. And I find that people look at this stuff—the human condition is such that people are into online photo galleries! The statistics from my Web site are kind of fascinating.

A fad? A toy? I wonder about that often—and I don't think it is. The more I experiment with the camera, the more I realize that it is changing, once again, the role of the Internet. I am finding that



Sony DSC-F1 digital camera.

if you combine the Internet and a digital camera, the Web evolves into something new—an online digital gallery that many people are truly interested in.

And that type of thinking causes me to realize that we are truly emerging into a world in which the Internet is set to soon provide us with the 500-million channel universe, in which everyone in the world will soon be able to establish their own television station. After all, the camera I am using takes still pictures, but already, digital video cameras are available from Sony and other manufacturers.

Think about the implications of that. Using one, virtually everyone in

the world could create their own movie and put it up on their Web site. As the bandwidth available to us on the Internet increases, downloading such a video will become a practical, everyday reality. Want your own TV station? No problem—establish one!

The only drawback so far? The price—this little camera retails for almost \$1,000, making it impractical for a lot of people. However, we all know that the price of new electronic products always decreases

quickly, and so I expect digital cameras to soon be on the market for as little as a couple of hundred dollars. When that happens, we will see a lot more digital galleries on line!

INTERNET COLUMN

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One caution when it comes to searching for travel information is that you should check the dates on any materials you download. Like the out-of-date tour book that lists a resort that has since gone out of business, you should be wary of Web-based information that does not appear to have been updated for some time.

As with searching for anything on the Web, you have to also be persistent. The information may be there but not easily

accessible. I offer my African Lion Safari example as an illustration. Just because Yahoo! did not know about it does not necessarily mean it is not there.

You never know what might turn up on the Web. If you are planning a trip, go to your favourite Web search engine and type in a few keywords. You might save yourself some time and money and you will leave home with the added sense of security that good information can give you.

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